

## PROMOTE LABOR STANDARDS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

**Goal 3.4B: Raise workers' protection and the safety of workplaces in selected countries by improving core labor standards and social safety net programs.**

**Results:** The Department's four performance indicators measuring success against this goal were substantially achieved. Three of four indicators were met or surpassed; one indicator was not achieved.

Indicator	Target	Results
Countries <i>committing</i> to improvements in core labor standards	8	35
Countries <i>committing</i> to strengthening social safety net programs	4	34
Countries <i>actually improving</i> social safety net programs	1 or more	0*
Legal decisions to improve core labor standards in target countries	1 or more	1

\*Projects in target countries were not funded until September 2000.

**Program Description:** The adoption by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in June 1998 of the Declaration on Fundamental Rights and Principles at Work, was an affirmation of the importance of core labor standards to the global economy. The Declaration introduced a new mechanism to hold member states accountable for providing basic labor rights. While many countries have made a commitment to improve the implementation of core labor standards, a number of the developing Nations lack the organizational and technical capabilities necessary to address the problem.

To assist countries in their capacity building, the Department's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB), through a cooperative agreement with the ILO, funds a technical assistance program that targets *protecting workers' basic rights* through improvements in the administration of labor law. A technical assistance program implemented directly by ILAB complements the ILO initiative. The program seeks to *economically empower workers* through



Repairing engines in Bangladesh.  
Photo from: USDOL/ILAB archive

improvements in workplace safety, social insurance funds, workforce training and job placement, and labor market efficiency.

### Analysis of Results:

#### *Protecting the Basic Rights of Workers*

The Department's FY 2000 agreement with the ILO funds a total of 12 projects in 35 countries to improve the protection of workers' basic rights. The original goal of eight countries was markedly exceeded, since DOL's original forecast did not foresee the number of regional projects designed to protect the basic rights of workers. Original estimates were based on a vision of implementing single projects in single countries.

Projects strategically targeted countries that lack the necessary technical capacity but are strongly committed to enforcing their local labor laws. Examples of projects include: a \$1.5 million project to eliminate bonded labor in Nepal; a \$1.5 million effort in Central America to prevent and quickly resolve labor disputes; a \$3.5 million project in East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) to improve the administration of labor law; and a \$3.2 million project in Bangladesh to improve employment opportunities for women.

#### *Economically Empowering Workers*

A total of 11 projects to economically empower workers was implemented in 34 countries in FY 2000, the first year of this program. The disparity between the program's goal of 4 countries versus the result of 34 countries committing to strengthening social safety net programs is attributable to several projects being regional in scope and involving multiple countries. For example, 13



countries are involved in the Caribbean regional labor exchange project and 8 countries are involved in the Central America safety and health project. DOL did not foresee the overwhelming enthusiasm with which this initiative was received by developing countries.

Key projects provided assistance for the following countries and objectives: a \$1 million project in the Ukraine to improve the safety of coal mines; a \$1 million effort in Nigeria to facilitate the transition of military personnel to civilian employment; an \$800,000 initiative to improve employment opportunities for disabled persons in El Salvador; and a \$700,000 effort in Bangladesh to improve workplace health and safety in hazardous industries.

In addition to utilizing contract resources, ILAB entered into a number of Inter-Agency Agreements (IAA) with other DOL agencies, such

Preparing a flower balik at Kunduchi Mongani in Tanzania.

Photo from: USDOL/ILAB archive



Zubaida at work in Bangladesh.  
Photo from: USDOL/ILAB archive

as the Mine Safety and Health Administration, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Employment and Training Administration, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, to deliver critical technical assistance to project countries.

#### *Legal Decisions Improving Labor Standards*

The Mexican Department of Labor signed a Joint Declaration with the United States and Canada, committing to promote that workers be provided information pertaining to collective bargaining agreements existing in their place of employment and to promote the use of eligible voters' lists and secret ballot elections in disputes over the right to administer the collective bargaining contract.

**Strategies:** The strategy employed for both programs during this initial year was to develop manageable projects in countries where the commitment to improve the protection of workers' rights and the economic well-being of workers was as great as the needs in those two areas. Commitment to the goals of the programs must come not only from governments, but also from the leading worker and employer organizations of those countries. DOL actively involves representatives of government, labor, and business in the design and implementation of all its projects.

DOL also seeks counterpart contributions, either financial or in-kind, in order to obtain local ownership of the project, a key element for success. Such cost sharing is also an important part of the effort to sustain improvements after the close of the project.

As these projects are implemented in the field, attention to project development gives way to project oversight. Every six months, ILAB conducts a comprehensive review of each project that could result in modifications to the project's design and implementation plan.

**Goal Assessment:** With major projects to improve core labor standards and strengthen social safety net programs now in progress, the program goals have been refined for FY 2001 to better reflect the purpose and intended outcomes of the two programs. ■